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ABSTRACT

Factors that might influence the acquisition of biliteracy were studied in four schools in the Greater New York Metropolitan Area (an Armenian-English school, a Greek-English school, a Hebrew-English school, and a French-English school). This report, the first of two parts, was written after 2 years of study in which the second year was spent both on further data collection and on confirming and processing data. The effect of studying two different scripts, and societal, pedagogical, and dialectal influences were addressed. Based on ethnographic observations, it is concluded that: (1) the students seemed to read and write English at least as well as those in monoliterate schools, and were also reading another language reasonably well; (2) discrepant writing systems rarely posed difficulty for biliteracy acquisition; (3) discrepancies between the spoken and printed language did not seem to complicate biliteracy acquisition any more than they do for monoliteracy acquisition; (4) teaching methods appeared to be minor factors in literacy acquisition, relative to other variables influencing this process; (5) English literacy was valued as a key to success in the world at large and as a key to ethnic approbation and leadership; (6) the major literacy-related problem of the minority ethnic language school was not so much the acquisition of biliteracy but the maintenance of biliteracy past adolescence, particularly of the minority language; and (7) minority language literacy is related to kin and community, history, and religious rituals. (SW)

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FINAL REPORT
(first part)

Grant Number NIE-G-79-0122

# THE ACQUISITION OF BILITERACY: A COMPARATIVE ETHNOGRAPHY OF MINORITY ETHNOLINGUISTIC SCHOOLS IN NEW YORK CITY

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# THE ACQUISITION OF BILITERACY: A COMPARATIVE ETHNOGRAPHY OF MINORITY ETHNOLINGUISTIC SCHOOLS IN NEW YORK CITY

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## INTRODUCTION

For the better part of two years, we studied four schools sponsored by ethnolinguistic minorities in the Greater New York Metropolitan Area. These schools were selected so as to facilitate the investigation of specific null-hypotheses concerning factors that might influence the acquisition of biliteracy, most particularly the null hypothesis that two different scripts need not pose any particular difficulty for the acquisition of biliteracy if societal, pedagogical and standard/dialect issues are all conducive to the pupils' initiation into the culture of reading and writing. Accordingly, we have studied an Armenian-English school, a Greek-English school, a Hebrew-English school and (for control purposes) a French-English school (i.e. a school in which "the other language," above and beyond English, utilizes a script that is for all intents and purposes, very similar to that of English).

Although the schools we have studied were purposively rather than randomly selected, they strike us as being rather typical of the universe of some 1500 minority ethnic community all-day schools in the United States today (Fishman 1980). These schools are sponsored by local ethnolinguistic communities throughout the country and, frequently, are associated with an ethno-religious tradition rather than merely with an ethno-secular one. Once again, the French school in our sample serves as a control in this connection since it has neither an ethno-community basis nor an ethno-religious linkage of any kind. It is simply one of the 50 or so French-English day schools that are scattered throughout the USA and that attract the children of parents who regard French as a language and culture of social, literary and artistic advantage ("enrichment") for themselves and for their children.*

The historical depth of ethno-religious bilingual education in the USA

Although none of the four** schools that we have studied is

*Although the French school is not ethnic community related, it, too, will be referred to in the pages that follow when parsimonious expressions such as "all the minority ethnolinguistic schools investigated in this study" or its equivalent is employed.

**Initially we also studied biliteracy acquisition in a fifth school, namely one that was Chinese-English. However, this school paid minimal attention to Chinese from the very outset and then dropped it from its curriculum entirely. We will refer to it from time to time but make no attempt to include it in all of our comparisons.

particularly old (the oldest having been established some forty years ago), they represent a type of education that has deep historical roots in our country. Such schools predate public education in the USA and, indeed, go back to colonial days when education was typically private, ethno-religiously associated and bilingual (often involving German or French and, less frequently, Hebrew, Dutch, Swedish and Spanish). For some three centuries, schools of this kind have continued to quietly serve their clienteles here and to do so bilingually. Since the advent of public education (not to speak of public bilingual education), they have receded in general visibility but not in importance vis-a-vis their particular constituencies. They are often part and parcel of ongoing ethno-community functioning and, as such, are expressions of Gemeinschaft (of intimacy, of bonds of affection, in-common fate, in-common norms, in-common expectations and in-common values) at a time when large city public education has become, at best, an expression of little more than Gesellschaft.

Un-exceptionality in social class and in educational excellence of schools studied

Lest their class-basis be misunderstood, it should be said at once that none of our schools is upper class. The

French school comes closest to such a designation in terms of the occupational distribution of its clientele with the Hebrew school coming a close second. Nevertheless, even these two schools reveal a modal middle class parental occupational distribution (largely small shopkeepers, teachers, accountants). In the Armenian and Greek schools, socioeconomic status mode moves toward an upper middle class and even a lower middle class constituency. The modest means of most families associated with such schools is even clearer when one turns to those that are under Catholic (Spanish, Italian, Polish), Eastern Orthodox (Ukrainian) or Protestant (Amish) sponsorship. All in all, except for the clearly exceptional school here and there, usually French, we are clearly dealing more with ethno-religious exceptionality than with "class position" vis-a-vis mainstream society.

The universe from which our sample schools are derived is also (as a whole) unexceptional educationally. By this we mean to say that although bilingual education is their norm--and in this they <u>are</u> clearly exceptional--their standards of attainment (of achievement, of pupil progress, of how much or how well pupils are taught and how much or how well they learn and retain that which they have learned) is quite comparable to that of their monolingual, public, mainstream

counterparts. These schools, as a whole, practice no pedagogic magic and they do not attain dramatically superior academic results. However, their students do leave them comfortably bilingual and ethno-religiously self-identified, and these are goals that have considerable value and meaning to the supporting communities, parental bodies, and professional staffs involved. This is even more so the case with the four schools that we selected for intensive study because of their respective reputations as good schools for children of average ability and from average homes. We did not want to study schools intended for the very rich, the very pious, the militantly ethnic or the intellectually gifted. Such schools would be too unusual--too offbeat--to teach us anything that might have generalizeable significance.

Other demographic characteristics of populations studied

The schools we have studied are rather similar to each other demographically, above and beyond their educational-qualitative and socioeconomic similarities. The lion's share (at least 80%) of the pupils in all schools are native born and English dominant. A similar share come from bilingual homes in which both English and the ethnic language are spoken (or at least read/prayed: Hebrew), except in the case of the French school, which as we have already explained, does not pertain to an ethnic community. Those homes that

are bilingual are also biliterate, although the amount of parental reading and writing in any language tends to be quite modest. None of the schools have enough non-English speaking new arrivals to set up special classes for them. As a result, they all tend to "handle" those few recent arrivals that they may have in the regular classes to which they would otherwise be assigned on the basis of age or prior education. Such children are given some special attention (but rarely are they provided with any special learning materials). The only partial exception in this connection is the Hebrew school. The latter school does have special teachers to work with children that are having reading/writing problems in either language but these children are as likely to be native speakers of English as native speakers of Hebrew.

Only the pupils attending the Greek school tend to live in the vicinity of their school to any extent. In all other cases, the vast majority of pupils travel considerable distances to and from school every day and do not reside in intact ethnic neighborhoods. There is also some slight demographic exceptionality attached to the Hebrew school in that

even its small contingent of foreign born (Israeli, Latin American) children are often English speaking by the time they arrive in the USA. In addition, a rather sizeable proportion of the Israeli children studying at the school are likely to return to their homeland once their fathers' consular or business assignments in New York are completed.

The teaching and administrative personnel in all schools tends to be bilingual and biliterate. Nevertheless, teachers of minority languages tend more often to be foreign born and older than do the teachers of English. Some of the latter (particularly in the French school) are not of the same ethnic extraction as that which is normally associated with the particular minority language which is unique to their school. Others speak English with an accent related to their ethnicity, even though they may be American born. This same accented English is often heard from the parents and pupils, just as their ethnic language is sometimes heard with an English coloring.

<u>What we are trying to find out, and what we are not trying to find out</u>

We are <u>not</u> trying to find out whether private bilingual schools are generally better than public bilingual schools.

(We studied no public schools.) We are not trying to find out if money or fanaticism "makes a difference" in student achievement. (We don't have enough of a range on either of these variables to utilize them as independent variables.) We are not trying to find out whether Hebrew schools are better than Armenian ones or whether French schools are better than Greek ones. We are trying to find out whether differences in script, in dialectal distance from the school norm, in pedagogic styles and in societal functions vis-a-vis the languages being taught, are noticeable concerns (issues, pre-occupations) in the schools under study as they pursue bilingualism, biliteracy and ethno-cultural socialization. We are concerned with whether their routes toward these goals are similar or dissimilar. We are concerned with whether they experience difficulties in any (or all) of the four areas of greatest interest to us. We are concerned with whether they approach their non-English languages differently than they do English. We wonder whether they each have a different approach to English or whether they are all more similar vis-a-vis English (how they teach it, how they rationalize it, what they want with it) than they

are vis-a-vis their respective non-English languages. We wonder whether they are trying to be "traditional" (i.e. "old country" oriented vis-a-vis their respective non-English languages) or whether they have been influenced by American thinking and practice in this respect. In each and every school, the pupils we studied became biliterate before our very eyes and did so practically without exception. Our question, therefore, is primarily: How did that happen? What helped? What hindered? That it happened is no longer a question.

All in all, we are interested in how four (reasonably good, reasonably normal, reasonably distinctive bilingual ethnic community schools pursue biliteracy. No one has ever bothered to inquire about this before. We think the answers might be of general interest, particularly since (a) many public bilingual schools seem to be having difficulty attaining biliteracy and since (b) many public monolingual schools seem to be having difficulty attaining monoliteracy. Perhaps a little contrastive perspective might help. At the very least,it should provide us with food for thought.

A word about our method and about this report

The method of data collection we have employed is that commonly referred to as school ethnography (Green and Wallat 1981). We have administered no tests. We have restricted ourselves fairly severely to observation and unobtrusive conversation. Although we have asked on occasion about home, neighborhood and church influences, we have made no observations in any locales other than the schools themselves. Thus, we know only what we have seen and heard, as tempered by what we have been told, with both of these data pools being restricted to the school, its personnel, its places, its pursuits and it practices.

This report is the second of three. The first of our three reports was written after the first year of observations and conversations. It is attached as Appendix I and was based upon our impressions, reflections and discussions with each other after a year of study had drawn to a close. This report is similarly derived but comes after two years of study in which the second year was spent both on some further data collection and (primarily) on data confirming and data processing. However, this report does not pretend to present fine-grained process-data. Our third report, to be completed some months hence, will be of that nature, although

the observational protocols from which that third report will ultimately be derived are attached to this report (and constitute appendices A, F, G and H, pertaining, respectively, to the Armenian, French, Greek and Hebrew schools studied). This report is, like its predecessor, based upon overall impressions. It will be fleshed out, corrected, improved by our third report but until that report is ready, this one will present our most judicious consensual impressions as to what it is that we have learned about how four ethno-communal bilingual schools cope with four dimensions of possible influence (sociographic, sociolinguistic, sociopedagogical and sociofunctional) in fostering biliteracy among their pupils.

The order or progression of our topics will be from the theoretically narrower to the theoretically broader, starting with the sociographic and sociolinguistic and ending with the sociopedagogic and sociofunctional. By following this order, we will also progress from concerns that are linguacentric to concerns that are increasingly aware of more than language, indeed, of more than education, in relation to biliteracy. In this way, we hope to explore the possibility that literacy per se (and, a fortiori, biliteracy) may be

dependent to some degree not merely on factors beyond language but, perhaps, upon influences that reach beyond the school itself.

THE SOCIOGRAPHIC DIMENSION

It makes good intuitive sense that there might be a sociographic dimension in biliteracy acquisition. Some writing systems are just more similar to English than others and such similarity may help (or, in terms of differentiating small differences, hinder) the overall process of mastering two writing systems. Other "theoretically" problematic sociographic considerations above and beyond overall similarity, are whether different writing and printing systems for a given language exist, and furthermore, whether there is a distinction between upper case and lower case letters in both of these systems. Finally, there is the potentially troublesome issue of whether reading and writing are taught sequentially or simultaneously and, to top it all off, whether the English and the non-English reading/writing systems are taught sequentially or simultaneously. As Table I reveals, quite a set of interacting difficulties are discernible, each posing etic problem in the mind of the researcher and of the concerned parent and pedagogue. A maximum "total problem score" of ten is possible for that school whose non-English

TABLE I: THEORETICAL VARIATION IN FIRST GRADE SOCIOGRAPHIC "PROBLEM SCORES"

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Armenian | 3 | + | - | - | - | - | 4 |
| Chinese | 5 | - | - | - | - | - | 5 |
| French | 1 | + | + | - | - | - | 3 |
| Greek | 2 | + | + | - | - | - | 4 |
| Hebrew | 4 | + | - | - | - | - | 5 |
| Total | | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |

1. Overall writing system difference vis-a-vis English
2. Separate writing and printing systems need to be learned.
3. Separate upper and lower case systems need to be learned.
4. English reading and writing systems are taught simultaneously.
5. "Own language" reading and writing systems are taught simultaneously.
6. English reading/writing is taught simultaneously with "own language" reading/writing.

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writing system is most different from English, has both upper and lower case letters, has separate writing and printing systems and tries to teach all of these systems and languages simultaneously. Fortunately, perhaps, no school receives a ten. Be that as it may, the theoretical sociographic total "problem score" appears to be entirely that: strictly theoretical. It bears no relationship whatsoever to any ranking across schools in reading/writing acheivement nor to any empirical relationship what-

soever to any real problems observed or reported to us in connection with biliteracy acquisition. The reason for this is simply because no school seemed to pay much attention to this dimension and certainly no school (i.e. no cluster of teachers and no group of parents) interpreted it as an independent problem in the acquisition of biliteracy.

This is not to say that schools do not attend to the shapes of letters and the differences between them. The Chinese school was a stickler along these lines and the French school had a special handwriting teacher (particularly for French but, derivatively, also for English). This is also not to say that the schools did not point out certain problematic differences between English and non-English writing (or printing) systems, both on the board and for class exercises. It is also not to say that teachers did not correct children's writing and reading in ways that called explicit attention to particular letters and their sounds or shapes. Finally, it is also not to say that most children did not have brief contrastive-writing/printing-system problems, nor that some few children did not have more substantial problems along these lines. All of the above did occur, but

none of these occurrences were either common or long-term phenomena. There were some reversals of direction in the Hebrew and Chinese schools. There were some mix-ups between similar English and Greek or English and Armenian letters. There were also some mix-ups between upper case and lower case letters, in Greek, in French and in English. However, all in all, none of these problems seemed to cluster disproportionately in one school or another, none seemed to be exacerbated or remedied by "order of presentation" considerations, and none seemed to be entirely avoided by stressing one language or one system (e.g., the printing system alone rather than both the printing and the writing systems together). There was actually a tremendous variation in approaches, across schools (and also within schools), to the manifold complexities of multiple writing and printing systems. Nevertheless, the outcome was rather similar everywhere. Within a few weeks to a few months, the entire issue disappeared from the agenda. A rare child here and there needed a rare reminder but, in general, all children learned both graphic systems without much fuss, without much effort and, seemingly, without much attention focused upon the issue of the differences between them. Sociographics became a non-issue much earlier than expected and remained such thereafter.

Does no awareness of a problem imply no problem?

If our observations with respect to the sociographic dimension revealed little of emic note, relative to problems or differences in the rate or level of biliteracy acquisition, our queries and discussions with pupils, parents, teachers and administrators revealed even less. As we will see, below, this was not because of lack of interest in sociographic issues. Interest was present aplenty but problem suspicion, recognition, or interpretation was not. Of course, the absence of problem awareness does not necessarily imply the absence of a problem. Problems may be ignored or supressed or projected unto other dimensions. However, since our data along this dimension is not merely derived from what we were told but relates primarily to what we observed, we can safely say that we also saw no sociographic problems of any significance. Thus, it did not seem to us that sociographic problems were being swept under the rug or pooh-poohed rather than admitted and coped with. Quite the contrary. Rather than the parents/teachers or others associated with the schools avoiding a problem that manifested itself as real to us, as investigators, they ultimately came to suspect that we were trying to find a problem that was unreal for our universe of study. Our etic compulsions had "manufactured" a problem-nexus and we were often incredulous and disappointed not to find anything that corres-

ponded to it. Seemingly, the miracle of monolingual reading/writing acquisition is sufficiently within the "limits" of the human mind to leave ample 'space" for the further miracle of bilingual reading/writing acquisition, where socio-cultural support for biliteracy is available, even where writing systems differ substantially. Not only do all of these schools accomplish biliteracy in rather short order, but the great range of writing and printing systems, both within languages and between languages, does not appear to tax the biliteracy acquisition process for any but a very minor proportion of children, and the latter, it should be remembered, might also have found monoliteracy acquisition taxing.

The positive tone of sociographic interest

Our "problem" orientation with respect to sociographic differences left us rather unprepared for the positive tone that frequently surrounded this dimension. We stumbled on this fact quite accidentally while trying to explain our "problematic suspicions" to a teacher in the Armenian school. Since she did not understand why it would occur to us that children might have "a problem" when simultaneously learning to read/write Armenian in the Armenian printing/writing system and English in the English printing/writing system, one of us

tried to explain our concern by suggesting that it might be far easier for the children if only one writing system were employed--the English one, of course--for both languages. Ours was not a serious programmatic suggestion (and even less an ideological one). Indeed, it was merely offered as an example in order to make the entire realm of discourse more understandable to our interlocutor Imagine our surprise when the result was quite different from what we had expected. Instead of "seeing the point," at lease theoretically, the interlocutor reacted both in horror as well with some suspicion concerning our venture as a whole. Anyone who could suggest that the Armenian writing system be abandoned deserved to be suspected of Anglo cultural-imperialism and, perhaps, even of genocide rather than merely of assimilationism. We, who had always realized that writing/printing systems were sociocultural "investments" were, nevertheless, unprepared for the depth of feeling, intellect and symbolism which surrounded them.

Writing/printing systems as cultural content and as cultural systems

The English mother tongue world is generally so secularized and de-mystified that its writing/printing system has

special symbolic meaning to it over and above its communicational functions. Not so for Armenians and Greeks whose writing/printing systems are associated with specific saints (note that the inventor of the Armenian alphabet was a saint), with Orthodox Christianity more generally, and with millennial persecution by ethno-religions associated with other writing/printing systems than their own. Whereas both Armenians and Greeks have remained loyal to their own ancient writing/printing systems, their common arch-enemy, the Turks, abandoned their own Arabo-Persian writing system in the 1920's and thus revealed their <u>infidelity to their own tradition</u> (whereas previously only <u>inhumanity toward outsiders</u> had been ascribed to them). Any culture capable of the former was, thereupon, conclusively demonstrated to be capable of the latter as well, both of these interpretations being clearly and equally unacceptable to the Armenian and Greek image of themselves.

The Hebrew and Chinese cases are only different from the foregoing in detail rather than in degree. In both cases, the Latin writing/printing system is Christianity rather than authenticity related. Even for Chinese who are Christian (and some are, particularly in the USA, although often only synchretistically so), the Chinese characters are symbolic not

only of deep cultural attachments but of mysteries of creation. For Jews, the Hebrew alphabet is explicitly associated with the Creator and with the very act of creation. Indeed, even before creation, the Hebrew writing system purportedly existed in the form of black fire on white fire and through it all creation was implemented.* Only the French school in our sample reported no other-worldly link for its writing/printing system, but it, too, was quite adamantly insistent that its diacritics could not be disposed of for mere reasons of convenience, learning ease, etc.

It might be interesting to speculate whether the cultural significance of the non-English writing systems would have been as adamantly held to if they had posed biliteracy acquisition problems. Our impression is that this would, indeed, have been the case.** However, the main point that

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*In the upper classes of the Hebrew school, an additional font (or type face) called ktav rashi is taught in order to study the writings of the 11th century commentator, Rabbi Shlomo Yitshaki, which are customarily printed in that distinctive type face. Although ktav rashi is quite different from ordinary Hebrew type, it is customarily learned in a few hours by students who are already moderately advanced in Hebraic studies.

**Although this was not the practice in the Chinese school we had begun to study, there are other Chinese ethno-community schools in the USA that have begun to utilize one or another romanization system to facilitate Chinese reading among children who do not speak the language natively (De Francis 1972). Even with native speakers, however, the traditional characters do significantly slow down the process of reading/writing acquisition (3-5 years vs 1-3 years for the other systems we have studied). Nevertheless, even in this case, the greater amount of time taken is viewed as non-problematic (precisely because this slower acquisition pace is traditionally so) and the sanctity of the characters remains unquestioned.

our research revealed is sufficiently strong, even given the fact that no such dilemma presented itself. Efficiency (ease, least effort in an objective time and motion sense) is not a cultural universal. We must take care not to apply it blindly to matters as symbolically culture-specific and as intensely culture-laden as many writing systems are apt to be.

## THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC DIMENSION

One of the recurring problems mentioned in the literature on child and adult literacy acquisition is the fact that the language of texts or of writing differs substantially from the language of everyday speech (see, e.g., Baratz and Shuy 1969). In some contexts, such as those of most white anglophone New Yorkers, the difference between their two varieties is rather slight, whether in the area of lexicon, syntax or phonology. Nevertheless, even though the difference <u>is</u> slight, teachers of English are still wont to complain that their pupils are unfamiliar with the structural conventions of written English and that they tend to litter their written work with unacaceptable markers of spoken informality. Be this as it may, it has not been conclusively demonstrated whether the many slight discrepancies between informal spoken English and more formal written/printed English pose much of a problem in the

acquisition of monoliteracy. If they do, it is an inescapable problem* and can serve as a baseline against which to examine the parallel process of biliteracy acquisition.

The "home country" sociolinguistic situations of Armenian, French, Greek and Hebrew

Minority ethnolinguistic community schools in the USA are often considerably exposed to educational and other societal conventions that obtain in their former "home countries." To some extent, this is due to no more than the power of inertia or cultural lag that leads some immigrant enclaves to be more traditional and unchanging than their home country counterparts. However, there are more overt link-factors as well that may also lead to a sociolinguistic transfer from "there" to "here." One of these factors is recent immigration itself which brings a steady trickle of pupils, parents and teachers who are oriented toward old culture ways. Another link factor is old country financial or pedagogic supervision. Teachers in the Greek schools in the USA, e.g., are regularly sent to Greece for refresher courses and seminars and receive a pension from the Greek government

*Only in The Netherlands has the norm for written Dutch been changed repeatedly (three times in this century!) in order to repeatedly re-approximate the spoken language (Geertz et al. 1977).

that is akin to the one they would receive had they been teaching in Greece proper. Teachers in Armenian and Hebrew schools are encouraged (and partially subsidized) to visit their "home countries" and to utilize textbooks specially prepared in those countries for use by schools abroad.* Although no official links of this kind exist in the French school, it is the explicit goal of that school to utilize French methods, materials and standards as far as possible. All in all, therefore, there is ample reason to inquire what sociolinguistic forces impact the monoliteracy processes in the old country in order to determine whether these processes are felt here as well.

Soviet Armenia has standardized a variety known as Western Armenian. This variety differs appreciably from the Eastern Armenian that has traditionally been used in Armenian "diaspora" schools in the Near East, Western Europe and the Americas. Recently, two minor processes have begun to disturb the reliance of "diaspora" schools on Eastern Armenian texts.

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*Although mainland Chinese authorities have little influence in Chinese-American schools, the Taiwanese authorities provide free (or highly subsidized) textbooks as well as summer vacations in Taiwan for students in the USA.

First of all, a growing number of Soviet subsidized texts has been made available to the diaspora schools, some of these being in Western Armenian. Secondly, a trickle of new arrivals has begun coming to the USA, hailing not from Lebanon, Egypt and elsewhere in the diaspora, as heretofore, but, rather, derived from Soviet Armenia proper and, therefore, Western Armenian speaking and reading. Finally, there is the background presence of Ecclesiastic Armenian, needed for participation in church services, which, although often still recognizable from modern Armenian, is substantially different from either the Eastern or the Western standard. All in all, the Armenian sociolinguistic situation is one whose complexity fully merits examination from the point of view of biliteracy acquisition in the USA.

French has one (and only one) "universal norm" since, as far as French schools are concerned, sociolinguistic variation either does not exist at all or, if it does exist, it does not belong within the school. The fact that our French school does not correspond to any native-speaking ethnolinguistic community further restricts the amount of non-school French with which the school needs to cope. There are a few pupils who are native speakers of French at the particular school

we have studied, but all teachers insist (as they do in France proper) that these pupils do not speak local dialects of any kind and that they are speakers of standard ("Parisian") French and nothing else. That such claims are grossly exaggerated in France per se is clear from a goodly number of studies recently published by scholars there (see International Journal of the Sociology of Language #29, 1981, edited by Tabouret-Keller [entire issue]). Whether or not the French mother tongue students in our school are really mono-varietal remains to be seen. At any rate, we would expect far less sociolinguistic repertoire complexity at our French school than at any of the other four that we have studied, precisely because so few students are of French ethnicity.

The Greek sociolinguistic situation in Greece itself was, until recently, an excruciatingly complex one. In addition to a host of regional varieties of demotiki--none of which were taught in school--there was both a largely artificial "compromise" semi-classical variety (Katarevusa) which alone was taught in school and which was long considered the only dignified language of reading/writing, from elementary school on through to tertiary and post-graduate education, on the one hand, and the considerably older ecclesiastic Greek of the Orthodox Church service, on the other hand. As

recently as 1976, the above situation was simplified considerably by demoting Katarevusa and adopting a demotik standard for school and governmental use. However, this new vernacular standard necessarily originally lacked texts, teachers who knew it and could teach it, and an educated class who could speak it. If all of these aspects of vernacular standardization are still being worked out in Greece proper, it is certainly worth inquiring how they are being worked out in the USA, in general, and in the school that we observed, in particular. Furthermore, with a constant trickle of new arrivals coming from various parts of Greece, it is doubly advisable to look carefully into the interaction between sociolinguistic variation and biliteracy acquisition in our Greek school.

The sociolinguistic situation vis-a-vis Hebrew in Israel resembles that of French in France to some extent. The revival of the language is recent enough so that native regional varieties are not yet available. However, country of origin differences are clearly noticeable, most European derived ("Ashkenazi") speakers of the language having a different phonological repertoire than do most Afro-Asian derived ("Sephardi") speakers. Furthermore, among the former there are still some who utilize a variety of Hebrew in ritual and worship which is characterized

by yet a different pronunciation and accentuation pattern. Finally, a recent tendency to introduce anglicisms into the language, particularly among young people and in econotechnical domains (Allany-Fainberg 1977), has become very pronounced (so much so that a parliamentary investigation has just been called for). Thus, even though the bulk of the students at the Hebrew school are not native speakers of the language (nor are their parents), their exposure (and that of their teachers) to Israeli influences is certainly great enough to merit attention to the sociolinguistic dimension within its setting. In addition, if the foregoing is not sufficiently suggestive of problem possibilities, most parents of pupils at this school have been trained to pray or participate in rituals in a variety of Hebrew which is phonologically distinct from that which the school itself employs.

Clearly, from all of the foregoing, <u>sociolinguistic distance between the language/variety of every day speech and the language/variety of literacy</u> is part of the intellectual and pedagogic heritage influencing most (if not all) of the minority ethnolinguistic schools we are studying.* As in

*The Chinese case also reveals considerable sociolinguistic variation. Most of the schools teach a "City Cantonese" reading of the characters <u>initially</u> and a Mandarin reading of the same characters in their <u>advanced classes</u>. Although this is rationalized on the basis of the fact that most pupils are of Cantonese extraction, in reality they are of rural origin--by and large--speaking dialects that are often neither mutually intelligible among themselves nor intelligible to speakers of City Cantonese.

the case of the sociographic dimension, we seem to have "the makings of a problem" that could impact biliteracy acquisition. Now let us see if that does, indeed, occur.

Various kinds of inter-variety distance as possible problems in the acquisition of biliteracy

In contrast with the above-mentioned type of inter-variety distance (i.e. inter-variety distance based upon culturally accepted social and historical processes), there are at least two other types of inter-variety distance that we have not yet discussed, namely (a) the distance between the learner's (non-native neophyte speaker's) variety and the school's target variety for reading and writing, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, (b) the distance between substantially interfered varieties (whether English influenced ethnic minority language or ethnic minority language influenced English) and the school's more puristic standard. Although the latter type of inter-variety distance also has very definite societal bases (rather than purely individual ones), these generally do not possess either intellectual acceptance or culturally positive significance. All in all, therefore, teachers may need to engage in three types of "language correction" rather than only in the type

which is related to home country spoken language vs. written/printed language distance (which we will henceforth refer to as Type C). Each of these three types of correction occurs in the schools we have studied but Type C was definitely least in evidence while Type B was clearly most common.

There were two schools in which language correction due to type C inter-variety distance did not occur at all, namely the French and the Hebrew school. Although Type C correction did occur, on occasion, in the Armenian and in the Greek schools, their occurrence there was so rare that they clearly could not be considered a real problem. Children arriving in the Greek school speaking discrepant regional demotik varieties and children arriving in the Armenian school speaking Western Armenian (or Arabic influenced, Russian influenced or French influenced Armenian) do require some special correction now and then, but not much even to begin with and almost none soon thereafter. The transformations seem to be few enough and the schools' reading/writing programs are sufficiently structured (patterned if not programmed) that children accustomed to discrepant varieties quickly make the necessary adaptations in their reading/writing work. Spoken discrepancies do last somewhat longer but even they are few in number and

frequency, and teachers in both schools were not at all inclined to call attention to them or to correct them as they do in reading/writing.* The children involved adapted to the school norm quickly, effortlessly, as if it were the most natural thing to do. There were also no parental pressures to the contrary (i.e. neither on behalf of Katarevusa nor on behalf of Western Armenian) to cope with and that, too, may have helped. As for the ecclesiastic varieties of both of these languages, neither school considered them to be its responsibility. Children were expected to learn those varieties by dint of long-term and frequent church attendance and participation, rather than at school.

Type A Inter-Variety Distance and Type B Inter-Variety Distance

All the schools provided much evidence of correction due to both remaining types of inter-variety distance. Type A corrections in English were limited to recently arrived non-English mother tongue children. Type A corrections in the minority languages were almost entirely encountered in the French and in the Hebrew schools (i.e. in the schools where most children

*Although it seems somewhat difficult to believe, the teachers at the Chinese school also claimed that non-Cantonese background children adapted easily to Cantonese reading-pronunciation and even to the spoken Cantonese of the teachers and of their classmates. Although the traditional characters remain the same in both cases, the distance between spoken standard Pekingese and spoken standard (city) Cantonese is great, indeed, perhaps comparable to that between French and Russian.

did not have these languages as mother tongues or as family/community languages). Type A corrections are indicative of insufficient language mastery for the reading/writing task at hand. Only in the Hebrew school were such insufficiencies vis-a-vis English directly tackled by assigning recent arrivals to special remedial teachers. On the other hand, such deficiencies vis-a-vis the ethnic minority languages were everywhere considered part and parcel of the regular classroom teachers' responsibility. Such deficiencies were most common in the French and Hebrew schools where almost all beginners were new to these respective languages. Overcoming Type A errors in these two schools in these languages was, therefore, viewed as the essence of the teaching-learning enterprise. Such errors were far less common in the Greek and Armenian schools where almost all children arrived speaking these languages at least moderately well and where the few who could not do so upon arrival were expected to learn more by dint of immersion than by more focused teacher-initiated effort. Type A correction did regularly decrease as the semester progressed and decreased again from first to second grade in both languages and in both schools.

Type B correction was primarily encountered in the very schools in which Type A correction was rarest, namely, in the Greek and Armenian schools,* most particularly in the former, and in both languages. In the Greek school, it was not only quite usual to hear pupils speak and read Greek "with an English flavor" but both pupils and teachers could be heard speaking and reading English with a Greek flavor. In pupil speech at least (far less so in writing since little free writing goes on in the early grades), Type B distance was recognizable at all levels of language (phonological, syntactic and lexical). Among several teachers, Greek (and also Armenian and Hebrew), phonological influences on English were not uncommon. Although these were generally encountered in the speech of foreign born teachers, American born teachers were also not entirely free of them. The latter would imply that Greek Americans particularly may still populate neighborhoods that are substantially their own and that in

*A modicum of Type B correction also occurred in the Hebrew school (among Israeli students who had begun to speak English in Israel proper) and even more infrequently in the French school (on the part of a very few American students who had lived in France for a year or two).

these areas non-native phonology was (and perhaps still is) intergenerationally transmitted and adopted by some native-born members and maintained by them into their adult years.

Teacher correction of Type B errors was rather rare insofar as English influences on the minority ethnic mother tongue are concerned. Seemingly, in this connection, teachers were of the opinion (consciously or unconsciously) that any use of the minority language needed to be encouraged or rewarded rather than interrupted and corrected. There were no special exercises to help pupils free themselves from anglicisms in phonology or in grammar. Lexical interferences were corrected only in writing, but most writing in the early grades is so controlled (copying, etc.) that the opportunity for such correction is quite minimal. Perhaps as a result of the tolerant attitude taken toward English influences on the minority language, there seemed to be only a very small decrease in their frequency over time. Insofar as Type B errors in the other direction (speech community based foreign influences on English) these were corrected most often in the very schools in which they occurred least (French and Hebrew) and were corrected least often in the schools in which they occurred most (Armenian and, particularly, Greek). In the latter schools, these errors did decrease but only very slightly during the year or from grade to grade. In both

directions of Type B interference, it may be that rather stable varieties have developed that are not likely to disappear quickly. They seem to have no impact on the acquisition of biliteracy (through grade 2) but might be much more troublesome in higher grades when individual composition writing is required. In the lower grades that we observed, those children and those schools most commonly associated with Type B discrepancies between their spoken and their written languages seemed to be reading and writing as much and as well as the others. It may be that this is due to the fact that in the lower grades speech, rather than reading/writing, is the main arena in which such errors are able to express themselves. At any rate, they do not seem to result in problems for early biliteracy acquisition.

THE SOCIOPEDAGOGICAL DIMENSION

English literacy-instruction in the United States (and perhaps elsewhere in the English mother tongue world as well) has long been a rationalized and demystified undertaking, informed by one or another "scientific" pedagogic school, theory, or method. Accordingly, the methods employed have not remained fixed and unaltered but, rather, they have changed in the light of empirical evidence, theoretical perspectives and broader educational perspectives or emphases. In other parts of the world, however, more traditional sociopedagogies were (and still are at times) involved in literacy instruction. These

traditional literacy-imparting approaches were usually embedded in equally traditional larger educational patterns that were themselves related to persuasive ethnoreligious systems that influenced all aspects of both daily life (low culture, little culture, part culture) and of high culture as well. The traditional Eastern European Jewish approach to the introduction of literacy (Roskies 1978, Stern 1950) involved not only the use of child-level motivators (e.g., dropping coins, nuts and raisins on the page of Hebrew print as the learner repeated the names and sounds of the letters) but choral repetition of Hebrew Biblical texts and their Yiddish translations as well as the committing of lengthy hallowed texts to memory so that they were not so much read as recited. Somewhat similar teaching-learning methods have been reported for different parts of the Islamic world,(Jones in press, Wagner in press) for Korean and even for Latin study in various parts of Europe from the fall of the Roman Empire through to early modern times. All of these sociopedagogies stress(ed) ritualized, "out loud" reading/recitation and assign(ed) to it a higher priority than to understanding (as well as a much higher priority than to writing); which was (and often still is) considered a necessarily rarer and more advanced skill.

Since four of our initially five schools served rather traditional ethno-religious communities (Armenian, Chinese,

Greek and Hebrew), we were interested in observing whether any such traditional methodologies of teaching reading/writing were still to be observed in their midst. If so, we were also concerned with whether these methods might not have been generalized from the ethnic minority language alone to the teaching of English reading/writing as well. On the other hand, the other direction of influence was also a distinct possibility that deserved to be investigated, namely, whether the more modern, "scientific" pedagogies for teaching English reading/writing might not have spread into literacy instruction with respect to the ethnic minority languages as well.

Pedagogy and sociopedagogy in the teaching of ethnic minority language reading/writing

Although it has recently become rather stylish to extol the virtues of traditional ethnocultural approaches to teaching reading/writing (see, e.g., Bettelheim and Zelan 1981), none of the four schools we observed most intensively has been gripped by any nostalgia for the "good old days" in this respect.* The French and the Hebrew schools appeared to be

*The Chinese school, although it devoted rather little time to Chinese literacy, followed a rather traditional pattern of endless copying and in-unison recitation of texts or repetition of the teacher's utterances designed to emphasize tonal differences. The characters selected for such exercises were initially rather simple and complexity of characters, rather than either lexical understandability or story coherence, seemed to determine the order of their presentation.

professionalized in a modern sense in this respect. Their teachers and administrators often referred to recent publications or experiments that justified the approaches/methods they were currently employing or the materials they had selected for use. Even in the Greek and Armenian schools, the rationales offered for methods and materials were empirical or practical ones (utilizing either an implicit or explicit level of success of a time-and-motion criterion) rather than traditional or ethno-ideological ones. The noted postponement of writing until reading/printing is well established as an example of this rather modern bent, whether or not it is, in fact, empirically substantiated.

In all schools, teachers were obviously concerned that the pupils enjoy learning to read and write. They wanted the texts to be attractive and child-oriented (and complained when this was not always the case). They were on guard against texts that were too difficult ("homeland" texts, e.g., were often considered too difficult because local pupils did not speak/understand the minority languages as much/well as did monolingual home country children) or uninteresting. All of the above are essentially modern pedagogic orientations as is the constant teacher interest in new and better texts, exer-

cises, methods, etc. All in all, truly unreconstructed traditional approaches were remarkable only by their absence. Teachers of ethnic minority literacy are by no means oriented to retain the methods/materials by means of which they or their grandparents were taught reading/writing. Nor does there seem to be any parental pressure to return to or retain the "good old methods" (whatever they might have been). On the contrary, teacher orientation is overwhelmingly modern, although in the Armenian and Greek schools (particularly in the latter school), there was little outside empirical information made available to teachers along these lines. Nevertheless, even each of these schools is affiliated with its own curriculum center which tries to provide pedagogic materials and methodological guidance to its affiliates.

As for the phonics vs. whole word controversy, it does not seem to rage or to have raged in ethnic minority language literacy instruction. A combination of both approaches is very common, first the phonic and then the whole word approach being emphasized. Teachers remember earlier stresses on "phonics alone" or on memorization and oral reading (still sometimes employed in almost all schools) but in all schools, all teachers are pleased that their current approaches are more flexible and eclectic than their counterparts were in "the good old days." On the other hand, some teachers bemoaned

the fact that although their methods have improved over the long term, child mastery of ethnic minority languages has decreased in the interim. As a result, children are not reading or writing as well as others used to do in the same grades and better methods do not seem to compensate for the weakening presence of the ethnic language in the very social fabric surrounding the schools themselves.

Pedagogy and sociopedagogy in the teaching of English reading/writing

Generally speaking, the pedagogic dimension is even more "professionalized" and, concomitantly, more de-ethnicized in connection with the teaching of English reading/writing than it is in conjunction with teaching reading/writing of the ethnic minority language. This is least so in the French school, where French is generally not the ethnic mother tongue of the pupils or parents. The pedagogies of teaching French literacy are conscientiously derived from continental experience and theory, both of which have a substantial research base and a professional literature of their own, although not of the same order of magnitude as those which are available for English. In the Hebrew school, too, the difference between the professionalization surrounding the school's two languages is merely a matter of reasonable degree. Jewish educators in the USA have long researched the methods and materials of

teaching Hebrew as a second language in the USA and various Israeli educators have also assisted materially in this process (Rabin and Schlesinger 1977) with respect to the modern diaspora more generally. Teachers of Hebrew in modern day schools (such as the one we have studied) have visited Israel frequently, met with educators, received bulletins and monographs dealing with various approaches to the teaching of Hebrew and have also been exposed to the counterpart literature dealing with English reading/writing. Thus, the main difference between them and the English teachers in their schools is not so much one of orientation and methods as of the availability of curricular and pedagogic materials per se. In the latter respect, of course, Hebrew is a "thin market" and teachers often create their own instructional texts and exercises because of the relative paucity of American prepared, commercially published material for Hebrew as a second language.

In the Armenian and Greek schools, the difference between the pedagogic approaches used for their two languages is more noticeable. Although teacher attitudes toward their ethnic languages are certainly both modern and positive, there is less specific awareness of the ethnic mother tongue teaching field and less assistance or encouragement along those very lines from their respective home countries than in the French

or Hebrew schools. The world of English literacy gets through to the English teachers at the Greek and Armenian schools ever so often--with methods, materials, theories, conferences and even equipment--whereas the world of Greek/Armenian literacy or Greek/Armenian literary-instruction does so far more rarely. As a result, there is a flavor and spirit of continuity about Greek and Armenian reading/writing instruction, but it is not continuity with authentic tradition as much as continuity with a decade or more of relatively stable texts and methods and own-made materials. On the other hand, English literacy pedagogic styles and materials fluctuate more, even though they do so less markedly than at the French and Hebrew schools. Comparatively speaking, however, methods of teaching English literacy in the Greek and Armenian schools are infinitely more change-prone and more responsive to a professional atmosphere than is the case with Greek and Armenian literacy efforts per se. Teachers of English remember or have heard of pedagogic controversies in the English literacy field. Teachers of Greek and Armenian remember or have heard of no such pedagogic controversies (although they have heard of "home country" controversies along the sociolinguistic dimension). Thus, whatever pedagogic transitions may have occurred with respect to

English literacy instruction in the Armenian and Greek schools during the past decade seem to have occurred slowly and by the introduction of increasing numbers of American-born (or long-term American resident) and American trained teachers, rather than as a result of overt pedagogical controversies in their field.

Similarity in methods, but some differences persist

The absence of any serious or adamant sociopedagogic tradition in the teaching of reading/writing of any of the languages involved is further demonstrated by the essential similarity in the pedagogic emphases employed. Although different pedagogic rationalizations are encountered, the actual practices are rather similar. Phonetic emphases seem to be great initially while whole word emphases tend to dominate subsequently until new letters/graphemes are introduced. At that point, a new phase of phonic stress is noticeable but it, in turn, is soon replaced by a renewed emphasis on larger gestalts (words, phrases, etc.).* If there is a literacy related sociopedagogic distinction between the English-literacy acquisition classes

*The Chinese school necessarily utilized a unique progression, namely that from less complex to more complex characters-and-tones. The notion of complexity was approximated in the other schools in terms of controlled vocabularies and grammatical considerations with respect to their minoirty ethnic mother tongue texts and materials Even English texts shared this notion in the sense of avoiding many orthographic problems unique to English as well as avoiding words not considered to be part of the child's vocabulary.

and the minority ethnic language literacy acquisition classes it borders on the sociofunctional (about which there will be more to be said below). English literacy acquisition is less accompanied by songs, by word games, by plays (and their accompanying "parts" to be learned), by choral/cooperative efforts and by holiday/ritual "events" than is minority ethnic mother tongue teaching and learning. English literacy is more serious, more businesslike, less fun and less intimacy related than is minority ethnic mother tongue literacy. English literacy is self-motivated insofar as pupil attitudes are concerned. Minority ethnic mother tongue literacy, in every school but the French, is more of a collective enterprise, a collective effort, a communal undertaking that has as its goal to arouse, capture and excite the hearts and minds of the pupils who might otherwise be insufficiently self-motivated. Functionality and effectivity are thus aspects of sociopedagogy. English is functionally all-pervasive and affectively neutral. The other languages (even French) are more functionally focused and affectively suffused. These differences often translate themselves into minute but important differences in teacher-pupil relations and in classroom atmosphere and they may contribute substantially to the ease, rate and level of minority language literacy acquisition, more than making up for any absence of "professionalism" in the teachers insofar as any firm, "scientific" basis of their efforts in concerned.

THE SOCIOFUNCTIONAL DIMENSION

From our immediately foregoing discussion, it should be clear that the schools we have been observing are not particularly unusual insofar as either pedagogies or sociopedagogies are concerned. There are no novel or unique methodologies known to and utilized by teachers or administrators in these schools that are of a different order or intensity of efficaciousness than those that are widely known and practiced in American monoliterate schools, public or private. Nor are the general conditions or circumstances of these schools clearly different than those that would be encountered in American monoliterate education. While it is true that class size is rather small in some of our schools (averaging just below 20 in the French, Hebrew and Armenian cases), this is not at all so in one school (Greek) where class size is clearly on a par with that in the public system (averaging just over 40). Although the average teacher in all four schools struck us as technically adequate and as motivationally positive, few if any of them impressed us as being absolutely exceptionally superior or head and shoulders above the public school average. While it is true that most teachers were very pleased to be teaching in their particular school rather than in the impersonal, turbulent and problem-ridden public schools, it was not they,

the teachers, who accounted for any substantial part of the difference between these schools and the public school average in New York City today. Nevertheless, the schools themselves were different, almost palpably so, and "the difference" was primarily a sociofunctional one, i.e a difference that pertained to the extent to which the schools were societally maintained, supervised and linked.

French is "something else"

Even the French schools, which had no real ethnic base, had a real consciousness of self, of purpose, of distinction, an elan or spirit that imparted a certain dignity to its administrators, teachers, pupils and parent body. There was a closeness about the school. Everyone involved with the school had chosen to be there and, in turn, was chosen (selected) to be there. They were appreciators of, participants in and contributors to French culture, a noble, intricate and beautiful creation. French would, could and did enrich them and it was obviously something to be learned, enjoyed, treasured and savored. It had made the world different and, therefore, obviously would enable each and every one of them to lead different, better, more sensitive, more cultured lives as well.

The function of the school was to make an extra dimension available to its pupils. Parents and teachers alike spoke of their pride to be associated with this function, of their pride to be contributing to it, of their involvement in safe-guarding its mission, and or their gratitude for the benefits that they or their children/pupils had derived from it. The elderly headmistress had a regal air about her as she discussed her lifelong dedication to bringing the benefits of French and French culture to several generations of American children. She stressed that the children were American and should be treated as such (the staff at this school invariably spoke English to each other and to the pupils outside of class) but that they would be uplifted, refined and enabled by the French mission of the school. The school had a mission and it came through loud and clear: in the decorations on its walls, in its assemblies, at its parent meetings, in its newsletter and, or course, in its classes. Its mission was to enable the French language and culture to function as an "open sesame" to a host of advantages, material, aesthetic, literary and, yes, even spiritual.

French language and culture, it seemed, does not need an ethnic community base nor a "homeland" in which it is natural and unchallenged in order to achieve its mission. It is perhaps the only non-English language in the USA that operates on quite so detached and rarefied a societal basis. The world is its oyster and the omnipresence of francophonie on every continent contributes to this sense of worldwide standing and worldwide appreciation. French is a key to the best that humanity has achieved everywhere and the mission of the school is to make this "best available to all who are members of its family.

The ethnic community as a Gemeinschaft

If there is a "gemeinschaft of the spirit" about the French school, then our other three schools are characterized by a Gemeinschaft both in a spiritual and in a corporeal sense. They add ethnicity, and, therefore, the myth* of kinship to the elan that cultural elevation provides. The other three schools are maintained by ethnic communities and their missions are not only to socialize for membership in these communities

*The term "myth" is used here not to imply absence of truth but, rather, to imply important for a particular ethnocultural tradition above and beyond any objective confirmation or confirmability. Co-ethnics often respond to each other as kin above and beyond any objectively documented kinship ties that they may have with one another.

(along "being," "doing" and "knowing" lines) but to strengthen and safeguard the communities per se by so doing. Like the French school, they too stress their "nobility of the spirit" (martyrdom for high principles, true religion and democracy being among their unique contributions to humanity) and, therefore, the ennobling, elevating and altogether exquisite natures of their ethno-cultures. However, in addition, they stress loyalty to immediate and broader family and responsibility for re-building and strengthening persecuted or otherwise endangered traditions. In these traditions, minority ethnic literacy is a sine qua non for participation, for recognition, for adult standing, for adult rewards. The mission of these schools is to foster access to such standing and rewards as well as to foster involvement in such recognition and participation. Without minority ethnic mother tongue literacy, none of this is viewed as being possible. Minority ethnic literacy may be more honored than used, but it is honored and the school reflects and implements this status.

English as bearer of ethnicity

English literacy, too, is fostered for ethnic functions, although English literacy obviously also has very broad extra-ethnic functions as well. Thus, English literacy not only stands for "them" (the non-ethnics, the Anglo-mainstream) but also for "us." English literacy is related to the work-sphere,

to governmental interaction, to staying abreast of world events and to recreational reading. However, in the work sphere, it is commonly as necessary for ethnically controlled or associated occupations as for non-ethnic ones. Within the ethnic communities themselves, English is commonly (often even predominantly, and, within the Jewish community: almost exclusively) utilized for business and professional reading/writing even between co-ethnics. English is increasingly the language of record for ethnic organizations serving all generations (although in the Greek and Armenian cases their ethnic mother tongues still serve this function predominantly for their respective first generations). English is even the increasingly common language of letters to the homeland both among the Jewish population studied as well as among second generation Greek parents.

Thus, all in all, literacy in the minority ethnic language and in English must be viewed functionally as substantially overlapping circles There are some ethnic functions--particularly those related to ethnoreligious reading/prayer--that are rather exclusively dominated by minority ethnic language literacy. The result is that without at least a minimum of such literacy, one is effectively cut off from some central traditional rituals and statuses of the ethnic community.

Even though ecclesiastic Greek and Armenian differ considerably from the school-taught varieties, the latter do give some appreciable entre to (that is, they have transfer value in mastering) the former and are absolutely required for any claim to adult level ethnoreligious studies. On the other hand, there is for nearly every Greek-American, Armenian-American and Jewish-American some crucial function of a non-ethnic variety for which only English literacy will serve. However, although the substance of these functions is non-ethnic, their successful implementation leads to ethnic community recognition as well. Finally, there is yet a third subset, namely that which consists of linguistically overlapping functions. Depending on the particular networks involved in implementing them, they may be implemented either via minority ethnic language or English literacy, both languages now having achieved legitimacy and been accorded recognition for these purposes within the ethnic community per se. So great is this third subset of functions for many second and third generation members that their ethnicity has become a distinctive way of being American and to that same extent, English is an expression of their ethnicity rather than merely of their supra-ethnicity.

Biliteracy acquisition and biliteracy retention

The above observations reinforce and complement our earlier conclusion that our three ethnic community schools have no conflict vis-a-vis English literacy. They not only teach it but stress it and they not only value it as an indispensable key to success in the world at large but also as a key to ethnic approbation, ethnic leadership and ethnic responsibility. English is not "the enemy," but, on the contrary, an obviously admired, desired and required desideratum. Although in the long run this may render co-literacy in the minority ethnic language increasingly difficult to maintain in any functions other than those directly associated with ethnoreligious core-sanctities, it is, nevertheless, the current state of affairs and helps explain why it is precisely literacy in the ethnic minority language rather than in English that is often most difficult to maintain in the higher grades of the ethnic community schools. In those grades, their pupils become more and more competitively oriented toward high school studies, primarily under non-ethnic auspices*, and these are, of course, in English only.

*There is only one Greek high school in the New York Metropolitan area and no Armenian high school at all. While there are several Hebrew high schools, most day school students transfer to general high schools on completion of elementary school.

Thus, the major literacy related problem of the minority ethnic language school is not so much the acquisition of biliteracy on the part of their pupils as the maintenance of such biliteracy past adolescence, particularly in the minority language arena. Adult members of these communities want their children to acquire literacy both in English and in the minority ethnic language but the latter generally serves as no more than a rite-de-passage, i.e as a socialization symbol. As little as the adults read and write in English, they generally read and write even less in their minority ethnic language. They have almost all lost a good bit of the reading/writing fluency that they once had, in their own childhood and adolescence, in this language and it is the rare pupil, indeed, who will not recapitulate this cycle of acquisition and loss. Nevertheless, it will also be the rare pupil who will not continue to respect (and even honor or treasure) the symbolic socialization function of minority ethnic language literacy for his/her children as well as for him/herself. Thus, the functions and missions of these schools will remain biliterate and, at least in the early grades we have studied, these schools are highly successful instruments of the societies that have established these goals for them.

The substantive side of minority ethnic literacy

The ethnic community school is surrounded by general American society and that society generates both indirect messages as well as direct rewards that foster English literacy acquisition, much above and beyond those (also not insubstantial) that are fostered by the ethnic home, school and community per se. Minority ethnic language literacy, on the other hand, is fostered only by the smaller ethnic community and by the school as its agent. What specific functions can the latter literacy fulfill? First of all, in our ethnic schools (and in the French school as well), minority language literacy fulfills school requirements and these, particularly for elementary school ages, can be quite powerful since they are associated with grades, compliments, promotions, graduations, etc. However, above and beyond school functions in and of themselves, such literacy is constantly related in the ethnic schools, to kin and community, to history and authenticity, to God and to sanctity, to morality and to martyrdom. Minority language literacy is related to home rituals (and, therefore, to being a good son or daughter), to church/synagogue rituals (and, therefore, to the ultimate mysteries), to community rituals (and, therefore, to fellowship and Gemeinschaft norms). The texts employed

and the assignments given deal with family rituals, holidays, obligations and commemorations. These materials often involve verbal art forms: songs, proverbs, collective recitations, poems, folktales, adaptations from hallowed texts (or, in the Hebrew school, these texts themselves) All in all, there is a concentration on artistically heightened and emotionally heightened literacy related material. There is some rote/ memorization (not as much as there was a generation ago and, at any rate, not directly related to literacy) but even it is placed in a functional setting that is preparatory to literacy-proximate worship or holiday ritual. Furthermore, minority ethnic literacy is often given intergenerational visibility. It is "displayed" at holiday celebrations and historical commemorations when parents and other elders are present. All in all, this is pretty powerful stuff and, indeed, as long as pupils are primarily home-family-church oriented, it is probably among the most powerful stuff (the most heightened, the most colorful, the most evocative) impacting their young lives. Here, then, is community-based literacy stressing ethnofamilial, ethnoreligious and ethnocommunal identity, participation, responsibility and recognition. This is sociofunctional literacy of a very intimate and powerful kind. Indeed, its impact may outlast by far the literacy by which it is initially accompanied.

BILITERACY ACQUISITION IN ETHNIC COMMUNITY SCHOOLS: SOME TENTATIVE SUBSTANTIVE CONCLUSIONS

1. The pupils we observed seemed to experience much pleasure and little pain in becoming biliterate. Although some "selection for success" was doubtlessly involved both in deciding who should attend these schools as well as in who remained in them (rather than dropped out of them), the lion's share of the pupils involved were very far from being geniuses, the teachers very far from being paragons of pedagogy, and the parents very far from being single-minded reinforcers of the schools' efforts. In fact, perhaps too little has been said about the mediocrity and contra-productivity of much that we observed. That being the case, we feel all the more certain that universal biliteracy is well within the ken of almost all children, almost all schools and almost all school communities. Generally speaking, the pupils we observed seemed to read and write English at least as well as those we had observed and heard or read about in the generality of monoliterate schools, if not a little better. We administered no tests and, therefore, we cannot say so with any great exactness, but it seemed to us that given the firm but modest literacy of their respective home environments, many of these students were reading English better and more enjoyably than their counter-

parts do in most monoliterate schools and were reading another language at least reasonably well in addition. Indeed, it seems to us that the pupils we observed lost nothing and gained greatly by their experience with biliteracy and that these gains were probably predictable for at least a few more years into the late elementary period.

2. Three of the four dimensions to which we were alert seemed to have had very little bearing on the outcomes that we noted above. Discrepant writing systems rarely posed much of a problem for biliteracy acquisition among the children whom we observed. This seemed to be true regardless of which language was taught first (English or the minority language) or, indeed, regardless of whether or not reading was taught in both languages simultaneously. Popular pedagogic notions as to which writing systems are "more phonetic" are usually mistaken (or only partially correct) at any rate and seem to be quite irrelevant to the biliteracy acquisition process across most of the real range of discrepancy or interference that obtains between writing systems. A clearly discrepant system like the Chinese does take more time to acquire but does so whether learned in a monoliterate or in a biliterate context. While it does seem wise to concentrate on the printing systems until they are mastered before introducing

the writing systems (wherever the two differ), this too may be more "popular wisdom" than a confirmed empirical finding and its limits remain to be tested. Within any printing system, there seems to be no difficulty in learning lower case and upper case letters (where these differ) simultaneously. All in all, the writing system factor seems to be a negligible one for biliteracy acquisition across the range or Euro-Mediterranean divergences and, most probably, across the entire range of grapheme/phoneme correspondencies. Syllabary/phonemic correspondencies and leftward/rightward directional discrepancies probably also pose no problem whatsoever for the bulk of elementary school learners. The majority of all children can probably acquire literacy and biliteracy with roughly equal facility and can do so approximately equally easily regardless of what writing systems are involved (but with the noted exception that the Chinese writing system does take appreciably longer to master whether acquired monoliterately or biliterately. "Strange writing systems" may seem like little more than "unnecessary burdens" to Western researchers but to members of their native-speech-and-writing communities, these systems are not only imbedded in their accompanying cultures but their cultures are imbedded in them (Blook 1980, Scribner and Cole 1981).

3. Discrepancies between the spoken language and the printed language do not seem to complicate biliteracy acquisition any more than they do monoliteracy acquisition. Dialect speakers do not necessarily take longer to learn the proper (i.e. standard) spelling (Firth 1980) or reading of the standard variety, particularly when teachers are familiar with and accepting of their students' dialects. The standard dialect, too, is just that, a dialect, and it is learned at roughly the same rate when tackled in a monoliterate or in a biliterate context. Where the standard is so discrepant from the dialect as to actually be incomprehensible to the pupil, the problem at hand is one of basic language learning rather than of biliteracy. Where "understanding" is a goal of literacy training (this is not universally so), the target language will usually be taught for comprehension before literacy in it is pursued. Once more, however, this is not a distinctive problem of biliteracy acquisition. Some gap, greater or lesser necessarily exists between the spoken variety and the printed variety of all literary languages. This may be coped with in a variety of ways (ignoring it if it is not too great the usual approach in the francophone world; accommodating writing to the spoken language, the usual approach in Holland; learning the book

variety by successive "small approximations," starting first with similar structures in both varieties and slowly moving toward increased dissimilarity, a recent approach in Egyptian children's television). Whatever the approach, it can just as well be followed in biliterate schooling as in monoliterate schooling. A colony of Dutch and Arabic speaking children in Egypt would not find their Dutch literacy impeded by their problems with standard (Classicized) Arabic,nor would they find their problems with standard (Classicized) Arabic literacy facilitated or complicated just because these problems did not exist in Dutch literacy.

4. There are a small number of different traditional pedagogies for teaching reading and writing. These are everywhere retreating under the onslaught of a small number of "scientific" methods (empirically validated against a criterion of rate or level). As a result, it is more than likely that biliteracy acquisition will be attained via the learners' two languages both being taught by roughly the same methods. Nevertheless, even where this is not the case, there is no reason to suspect that the methodological differences that obtained would influence the rate or level of literacy in either language in comparison to the monolingual norm for each. All in all, reading can probably be taught equally effectively by a variety of (but not necessarily by all) methods. Methodology

is usually such a minor factor in literacy acquisition that relative to other variables influencing this process, it is probably of negligible importance in and of itself.

5. The "problem orientation" (discrepant writing systems are "a problem," discrepancies between the spoken language and the written language are "a problem," discrepancies between method a for teaching literacy in language A and method b for teaching literacy in language B are "a problem") is partially rooted in a widespread bias against societal bilingualism (and, therefore, against societal biliteracy) and partially rooted in the over-professionalization and under-socialization of literacy acquisition. To the extent that biliteracy itself is seen as abnormal, atypical, elitist or undesirable, it will constantly be suspected of being problem-ridden. In actuality, it is no more unnatural than being binocular or binaural. It is not a superhuman feat and is the common experience of millions upon millions of individuals served by scores of educational establishments throughout the world. If it can be widely achieved in India (e.g., provincial language, Hindi and English), in the Arabic world (e.g., Arabic and French or Arabic and English) and on the Chinese mainland (e.g., Putongua and Cantonese), there is

no technical reason why it cannot be achieved in the USA and in other technologically advanced Western societies. However, not only is the goal of societal bilingualism (and, therefore, of societal biliteracy) ideologically "suspect"--both on the part of capitalist and communist protectors and prospective indoctrinators of the "masses" alike, but, in addition, the reading process per se has been surrendered to technicians whose stock in trade is to concentrate on problematic side-effects rather than on dominant main effects. Teachers and parents alike have been traumatized and tyrannized by reading methods and reading problems rather than devoted to the major task of jointly building a literacy (or biliteracy) focused school-in-society relationship. Mid-century bilingualism, too, was regarded primarily as a "problem" and as psychoeducationally contraindicated by most American social and educational spokesmen. Some thirty years later it is widely recognized that society can make a problem out of bilingualism but that bilingualism per se is an asset rather than a problem. This same realization is now needed vis-a-vis biliteracy.

6. Nothing more is ultimately required in the mind of the learner for the acquisition of literacy than is required for the acquisition of language. Nothing more is ultimately required for the acquisition of biliteracy than for the acquisition of monoliteracy. In all cases, the major stimulus and sustenance is early and pleasurably rewarding

immersion in a sociocultural milieu in which reading and writing are not only admired, practiced and rewarded but in which they are required for social memberships, social statuses, social mobility and social roles and socially recognized accordingly when mastered. Massive reading problems are ultimately massively derived from massive societal failure to encourage and sustain literacy. Massive incredulity with respect to the possibilities, pleasures and profits of societal biliteracy are derived from massive incredulity (nay, suspicion if not hostility) toward societal bilinqualism. Societal biliteracy cannot be maintained by schools alone, anymore than monoliteracy (or algebra, or history, or any other "subject") can. Schools can briefly attain these goals when learners are sufficiently young and impressionable, when school still looms large in their order of influences. However, beginning with adolescence, other influences become continually stronger and, ultimately, dominant--the peer society, the work sphere, the larger (regional, national, international) opportunity system. If these are rejective or insufficiently rewarding of school-based expertise, the latter withers and is abandoned.

Basically, (bi)literacy is no more class dependent than artistry, poetry, rhythm or creativity. It can be successfully supported by poor societies and small societies, by minorities and pre-modern traditions, as long as they are able to establish and maintain their own cultural mainsprings and provided (bi)literacy is stressed among them and made an accessible cultural skill by them. Basically, (bi)-literacy is even less a guarantee of social mobility than it is a resultant of it. Literacy (and biliteracy) as a societal phenomenon, is an aspect of total sociocultural values and processes. It, in turn, fosters these values and processes, be they ethnoreligious or econotechnical. In an optimally just and nurturing society, concerned for the optimal development of the intellectual, aesthetic, moral and emotional development of all its children, literacy (and biliteracy) could easily be made available to all and attained by all. Our observations of four schools that are pursuing it (admittedly imperfectly but, at least, universally within their own walls) convinces us that both literacy and biliteracy are far rarer skills and appreciations than they need to be. Certainly American society would gain greatly from fostering both.

Ultimately, the greatest gain from our study of biliteracy is a deeper realization of how much is gained from it, at so little additional expense, by children differing hugely in ability and temperament, when their worlds (their schools and homes) are so organized as to foster it. Under those circumstances, it becomes not a rare skill nor an esoteric refinement but a basic factor in all societally encumbered processes.

## METHODOLOGICAL POSTSCRIPT

Ethnography itself (viewed simply as a method detached from any particular study and its constraints) is a virtually unlimited way of getting to know about any involved human activity. However, with respect to any societally based study of schools and schooling, an ethnography focused on teachers, pupils and administrators does have a certain restricted focus which cuts it off from some of the data of interest. So much that is pertinent (indeed, crucial) to schools and schooling takes place in the home, on the street, in the neighborhood, in the church and in pupil peer groups that an ethnography that is limited to schools and institutional schooling per se is necessarily incomplete. With respect to these out-of-school foci of influence, we were restricted to asking about them, whereas with respect to in-school foci of influence, we could (and did) always compare what we were told with what we heard and saw by ourselves. Optimally,

therefore, we would have wanted to visit students and parents (and even teachers and administrators) in their homes and observe their biliteracy (in action or in un-action). Unfortunately, this was not possible, given our budget of time and resources. Nor was it possible to observe the parents in their places of work, in their churches or in their organizations. Even less possible was the inclusion of other adult leaders of the community in our scope of study. Hopefully a more exhaustive study along these very lines will be "doable" in the future. It is much needed if the ethnography of literacy and biliteracy are to attain the scope that is necessary so that their processes (determinants and consequences) can be fully understood on the basis of maximally reliable and valid data.

The in-school data presented and discussed in our report derives from more than one observer and has been checked for consistency (replicability). The out-of-school data presented is based on the self-reports of our subjects and was not subjectable to the same standards of independent reliability or confirmability that were applied to our in-school data. Although our out-of-school data <u>does</u> have face validity, we will not be fully satisfied with it until it, too, receives inter-observer consistency.

A NOTE CONCERNING FURTHER ANALYSES

Since it was necessary to submit this report without further delay, it does not include analyses of detailed process data. Such analyses of a veritable mountain of "items" (observations, discussions) are still underway and are roughly one quarter completed as this report is being written. What follows is an enumeration of the types of analyses that are being prepared and that will be available by the end of the academic year. For each of the analytic parameters listed below (as well as for the imbedding or cross-tabulation of certain parameters with others), a uniform set of basic questions will be posed and answered:

(a) Do the grades of instruction differ significantly from each other (with respect to processes pertaining to these parameters) within schools?

(b) Do the grades of instruction differ significantly from each other (with respect to processes pertaining to these parameters) across schools?

(c) Do the schools differ significantly from each other (with respect to processes pertaining to these parameters) across grades?

The analytic parameters (and their sub-categories) are as follows, per "unit" of observation:

1. Language or languages observed

2. Grade observed (with separate indication for ungraded observations)
3 Observation date, by trimester, i.e. September-December, January-March, April-June
4. Observation year (1979-1980, 1980-1981)
5. Academic personnel involved in observation if any: principal, learning consultant, teacher, counselor (Observations and interviews are differentiated.)
6. Non-academic personnel involved in observation, if any: community leaders, religious leaders, students, parent, volunteers (Observations and interviews are differentiated.)
7. Language learning incidents: reading, speaking, writing, general
8. Sociographic issues: reading print, reading writing, writing print, writing writing (Within language and between language incidents are differentiated.)
9. Sociopedagogic strategies re decoding: analytic, synthetic, syllabaries, sentence reading
10. Unit of instruction: class, small group, individual
11. Approaches: experiential, basal reading, individual, teacher-made material

12. Oral reading: round robin, choral, individual, silent
13. Location of literacy learning: home, school, community
14. Topical/contextual focus of observation: school as a whole, classroom, class activity, parents, staff, students, community, ethnic culture, American culture
15. Focus of learning material: home, community, church, school, other
16. Sociolinguistic dimension: standard/non-standard incident pertaining to lexicon, phonology, morpho-syntactics, other (prosodics)
17. Contrastive language incidents: lexicon, phonology, morpho-syntactics, other
18. Use of one language to teach the other: use of English to teach ethnic language; use of ethnic language to teach English
19. Interference: English interference in ethnic language; ethnic language interference in English
20. Other bilingual incidents: English in the ethnic language lesson/context; ethnic language in the English lesson/context (paraphrase, switching, metaphor, etc.)

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# ETHNOCULTURAL DIMENSIONS IN THE ACQUISITION AND RETENTION OF BILITERACY

Although most of us have lost the innocence of nineteenth century educators and social reformers who believed that widespread literacy itself would automatically usher in a better world, we all—professional teachers and professional students alike—still tend to believe in literacy. Indeed, Stahl has catalogued twelve very common intellectual assumptions, nay, convictions, concerning the benefits of literacy, among them being refinement of language, widening of interest, learning through indirect experience, changing perceptions of reality, acquiring deeper understanding of human nature, and gaining greater perspective on one's self.[1] Not being unduly influenced by the pragmatic philosophy of the New World, Stahl—a product of Central European literary idealism—does not mention the economic benefits from literacy that most Americans would immediately specify. However, be we idealists or pragmatists, we tend to agree that literacy is a good thing and that there should be more of it; that is, that its level should be raised and its distribution more equitably extended. We are alarmed at the currently retreating levels of literacy at the levels of secondary and tertiary education and we bemoan the consequences of such retreat for an intelligent electorate, for a sound economy, and, indeed, for a civilized citizenry. The Old Order Amish and Mennonite skepticism with respect to literacy—particularly their notion of "too much literacy"—strikes us an unsuitable societal model for life in the midst of rapid urban change and increasing social complexity. It is in this very context that I hope to take you for a tour of several schools pursuing literacy in *two* languages.

Given the apparent difficulty experienced by American urban school

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[1] Abraham Stahl, "Creative Writers on the Effects of Reading," *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 7 (1975), 112-122.

systems in attaining adult levels of *mono*literacy, it may seem rather indelicate of me to stress, as I intend to do, that *bi*literacy—the mastery of reading in particular, and at times also writing, in two (or more) languages—is not at all a rare skill among that portion of mankind that has successfully won the battle for literacy. I do so, however, not only because societal bilingualism happens to be my particular area of professional competence, but because *bi*literacy particularly lends itself to appreciations that may also help us understand *mono*literacy differently and, perhaps, even better than before.

## VARIOUS KINDS OF BILITERACY

Perhaps the major force for biliteracy today, on a world-wide basis, is the continued spread of English as a second language almost everywhere.[2] The ability to read English has become no more than a taken-for-granted characteristic of the average younger Scandinavian and German and is close to approaching that status among educated (i.e., literate) younger Israelis, Arabs, Japanese, and Indians (from India). In geographically smaller spheres of influence, French and Russian, too, are having the same effect outside of their own national borders. On a still smaller scale, the movements for one or another international auxiliary language also result in the spread of biliteracy since literacy in any one of them is always acquired by individuals who are already literate in one ethnocultural language. Let us call this type of biliteracy *language-of-wider-communication based biliteracy*. It is usually the result of the expansion of econo-technical, commercial, religious, ideological, or cultural establishments to such an extent that ethnoculturally diverse first language users find it advantageous not only to use the language of wider communication (LWC) when addressing mother tongue speakers of that language, but to use it with one another as well.

Quite a different constellation of biliteracy is that which may be labeled *traditional*. This much over used word means many different things, but one thing that it always means is assumed historical depth. There are a few biliteracy traditions that may have started via the spread of languages of wider communication but that have indigenized "the other language" to such an extent that it has become a well established vehicle of *intra*group literacy. Indeed, when the two languages are genetically related they are sometimes viewed as one. Thus traditional Jewish biliteracy in Hebrew and

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[2] Joshua A. Fishman, Robert L. Cooper, and Andrew W. Conrad, *The Spread of English* (Rowley: Newbury House, 1977).

Judeo-Aramaic was and is frequently interpreted in this fashion (the two together being designated *Loshn Koydesh*). So is Greek facility in Classical and Katarevusa, and now in Demotiki texts, and Chinese facility in Classical Mandarin and in modern Pekingese, not to mention regional, e.g., Cantonese, texts. However, Old Order Pennsylvania German traditional biliteracy is not of this two-in-one kind. The two—Luther Bible German and English—are definitely *two* and not *one*, although English is also used primarily for *intra*group purposes. The Older Order folk may, now and then, write a letter or send a bill to an outsider, but what they publish in English they publish for their own edification. This, then, is the hallmark of traditional biliteracy, regardless of the historical or linguistic provenance of the languages involved. Unlike LWC biliteracy, where one language is primarily inward looking and the other is a window to the outside world, traditional biliteracy utilizes two languages primarily for *intra*group purposes.[3]

Finally we come to *(im)migration based biliteracy*. This type of biliteracy shares some features with each of the foregoing types. It is like *LWC biliteracy* in that one literacy tradition is obviously acquired from and directed toward *inter*group communication. It is like traditional biliteracy in that it has a strong authenticity or language maintenance stress as well. It differs from LWC biliteracy in that instead of a language having moved or spread to a new speech community, a speech community has moved to a new language environment. On the other hand, it differs from traditional biliteracy in that the newly acquired literacy tradition is exactly that, new rather than indigenized. Such is the nature of mass migrations in the modern world that quite a bit of *(im)migrant* biliteracy is in evidence. One finds ample examples of (im)migrant based biliteracy in expatriate European communities in Latin America, diaspora communities of Indians (from India), Armenians, and Lebanese, the world-wide (particularly the Third World-wide) phenomena of consular and diplomatic/commercial/technical staffs and their families, not to mention the honest-to-goodness immigrants and refugees that have resettled en masse throughout the world—not the least of all in the U.S.A. Certainly New York City is a natural laboratory for the study of just such biliteracy, as it is, indeed, for the study of biliteracy of all three kinds.

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[3] Charles A. Ferguson, "The Role of Arabic in Ethiopia: A Sociolinguistic Perspective," *Georgetown Roundtable on Languages and Linguistics* (1970), 355-370, and "Patterns of Literacy in Multilingual Situations," *Georgetown Roundtable on Languages and Linguistics* (1979), 582-590.

Let us take a tour of some biliterate school-and-community settings in New York and in doing so, ask ourselves how they manage to do it. For the purpose of ethnocultural comparisons, we will visit a French school, a Hebrew school, a Greek school, an Armenian school and a Chinese school, all five of them being all-day schools and, therefore, teaching English as well as their more particularistic languages. The first school, French, is an example of LWC based biliteracy; the second, Hebrew, an example of a mixed case of traditional biliteracy and immigrant biliteracy (potentially of triliteracy, if Hebrew and Aramaic are counted separately, and of quadriliteracy, if Yiddish too is seriously employed—as it is by many schools of this community); while the last three, Greek, Armenian, and Chinese, are more usual examples of immigrant biliteracy. These schools are representative of the universe of some 1500 such bilingual/biliterate/bicultural day schools in the U.S.A. today, the latter themselves being no more than a quarter of our country's total current bilingual/bicultural schooling effort under non-public auspices.[4]

## ETHNOFUNCTIONAL COMPARISONS

In stable bilingual communities the two languages employed have different functional allocations; they are used for at least partially unique situations, topics, role relations, or interactions. To the extent that this functional uniqueness is preserved and protected, their separate functional continuity is maintained. So too, perhaps, with stable societal biliteracy. Speech communities maintain biliteracy institutions such as schools because they are convinced that they need two literacies for two at least partially distinct sets of functions. In all of the communities we are visiting, English is the link not only to the "outside world" politically and culturally, but to most of the world of work, and the worlds of sports and amusement and entertainment to the extent that these are recognized. Parents want their children to be able to read English well—and to a lesser extent to write English well—and most parents in almost all of the five groups have mastered these skills themselves to a reasonable degree. Although some parents in each community do quite a lot of English reading and writing, and although, on the whole, they all generally fall within the broad middle class and are predominantly second generation American born (except in

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[4] Joshua A. Fishman and Barbara Markman, *The Ethnic Mother-Tongue School in America: Assumptions, Findings, Directory* (New York: Yeshiva University, 1979). Multilithed report to NIE under Grant G-78-0133.

the Greek school), the newspaper, the favorite magazine, a little business-related reading, a modicum of correspondence, and a fashionable book every once in a while account for all the English reading and writing of the majority.

When we examine the functional roles and the social reward systems for non-English reading, a very diverse picture is obtained. French reading symbolically stands for belle lettres and the highest esthetic experience of Western civlization. It appears, overtly, however, that very little French reading is engaged in, and that which does occur is much more likely to deal with cooking, fashions, and etiquette. Hebrew reading is generally primarily rote recitation of prayers with only one eye on the well worn text. Some Jewish parents do, of course, look into rather recondite Talmudic texts on a rather regular basis, but only the men have ever had a chance to learn how to do so. While Yiddish can be read by some members of both sexes, on the other hand, the material read is far lighter—sometimes humorous and intimate—and the frequency of reading Yiddish is even less than for Hebrew as a result of functional competition with both English and Hebrew. Both Greek parents and Armenian parents generally have a smattering of the ecclesiastical reading necessary at their church services. Their reading in the modern language is also often religiously oriented and overwhelmingly ethnic in content, as is that of the Chinese parents. The children's reading in these languages is equally intra-community oriented; it focuses on material simply not available and, commonly, not desired to be available in English. Only French stands apart from the following generalization to some extent—because French has international connotations that the other languages lack—but for the others it is quite literally true: ethnic mother tongue literacy is pursued and well mastered by children during their school years, because their parents, who may have already lost part of the biliterate fluency that they too had as children, nevertheless view it as a mark of ethnic belonging, sophistication, and leadership. Ethnic language literacy is associated, among adult members of the community, with the ideal ethnic culture, with the best that the tradition has created and with the finest that it has to offer. It is primarily of symbolic usefulness rather than of practical usefulness; it has sentimental functionality rather than broad instrumental functionality. However, for all that, ethnic language literacy is strongly valued by the parents. The school for them is a major socialization channel into the ethnic community and into the pursuit of ethnic continuity. The acquisition of ethnic language literacy is viewed as a prerequisite for the optimal attainment of both community and continuity, even if it is not always absolutely necessary for the adults who support the schools themselves. Coming to know one's ethnicity is strongly

related to literacy in each of these cases.[5] Their schools focus on "knowing" and, therefore, on literacy acquisition, even if ethnic literacy ultimately becomes a somewhat rare and rusty skill for most adult members of the community.

## ETHNOPEDAGOGIC COMPARISONS

English reading in each of the schools is pursued in accord with rather modern American methods. Phonics and whole word methods—analytic and synthetic approaches—are combined, with early emphasis being more on the former than on the latter. Only some ten percent of the children are non-native speakers of English, and even fewer are less than fluent in English by the time they arrive in school. Non-fluent English speakers are given different degrees of initial attention—never very much or for very long since the schools lack the budgets and the manpower and the conviction needed in order to give more attention. Nonetheless, non-English mother tongue pupils never remain a problem for more than a semester to a year at most. There is nothing, furthermore, about the way English is taught that reflects different pedagogic cultures, not even in the Greek and Armenian schools where the teachers of English are generally fluent speakers of Greek and Armenian and were themselves students in schools not unlike the ones in which they are now teaching. With respect to how English reading is taught, the schools are typically good, white, middle class American schools. Not so when it comes to teaching children how to read their non-English language.

French reading, taught with great stress on "proper" standard pronunciation, is taught somewhat before English reading on the ground that it is more phonetic and, therefore, helps in the acquisition of English reading as well. Hebrew and Chinese reading, on the other hand, are taught somewhat later than—and, in the Chinese case, also more slowly than—English reading. Hebrew reading is stressed only after prayers have been fully internalized although readiness for it is introduced earlier; and, indeed, Hebrew reading, when first acquired, briefly interferes with the rapidity and automaticity of prayer.[6] Chinese reading comes rather slowly and is accompanied by seemingly endless choral repetition and copying

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[5] Joshua A. Fishman, "Language and Ethnicity," in *Language, Ethnicity and Intergroup Relations*, ed. H. Giles (New York: Academic Press, 1977), pp. 15-58, and Joshua A. Fishman, "Language, Ethnicity, and Racism," *Georgetown Roundtable on Languages and Linguistics* (1977), 297-309.

[6] For earlier Eastern European approaches to childhood acquisition of Hebrew literacy see Diane Rothin, "Alphabet Instruction in the East European Heder: Some Comparative and Historical Notes," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science*, 17 (1978), 21-53.

with close attention to the sequence of strokes. Finally, Greek and Armenian reading are pursued simultaneously with English reading. The instructional approach makes much use of coloring books and picture books, singing, and dramatics. Learning to read Greek and Armenian is accompanied by lots of ethnic fun and games. The French school's conviction that French is more phonetic than English is also widely shared vis-a-vis their own ethnic writing systems among Greek and Armenian teachers, is even claimed by the Chinese teachers (!), and is least frequently claimed by teachers of Hebrew. Nevertheless, phonetic or not, Hebrew reading generally seems to be well acquired by the second grade, and Chinese reading, although it takes longer, is not viewed as taking an inordinate amount of time. A "traditional" frame of reference is obviously being employed and being applied to Chinese but not to English, since English is *supposed* to "go faster."

Thus, in terms of ethnopedagogy, we are observing a variety of rationales, procedures, and rates. Ethnopedagogies in New York City represent different traditions of literacy inculcation as these interact with the novel task of imparting English literacy as well. Interestingly enough, however, none of the schools views biliteracy as particularly difficult or problematic, and none of them reports experiencing drop-outs, complaints, or tears in connection with its pursuit. Nothing less than biliteracy is wanted, pursued, or achieved. Biliteracy is viewed as normal in both senses of the word, norm as common and norm as desired.

## ETHNOLINGUISTIC COMPARISONS

One of the major areas of applied linguistics in the U.S.A. is that which deals with the teaching of reading to native speakers of those varieties of English that are structurally quite different from standard school English. Most of these "problem learners" are speakers of Black English, and a recent District Federal Court order requires teachers to learn it themselves so that they can better teach *in it* and, ultimately, *through it* to ease the transition to standard English. The difficulties experienced in connection with dialectal distance from the school norm in American public education might prepare us to expect or at least to look for similar or even greater difficulties in the non-English community schools that we have been studying. Actually, no such difficulties are encountered.

Insofar as English is concerned, none of the American-born pupils arrive in school with more than mild non-standard accents, accents which reflect the informal English of their homes and neighborhoods. Many teachers in these schools also share these non-standard accents (intonations, pro-

sodics) but have them under good control, which is to say they can minimize them in school when they interact in the teacher role either with colleagues, pupils, or parents. Some teachers—particularly in the Greek school—teach in accented English although their pupils' English is always less accented than their own. Teachers seem to aim at nothing more than adding school English or strengthening it in the children's pre-existing English repertoire of Greek-English, Armenian-English, Jewish-English, or Chinese-English, respectively. On the other hand, American-born pupils at the French school do not come speaking French-English; and this, therefore, eliminates this particular problem for the French school, except as every school in the world must seek to take vernacular speakers several notches closer to the school standard, at least insofar as reading and writing are concerned. However, it is not really much of a problem for the other schools either. No one's English in the five schools we are reviewing is as significantly discrepant from the school norm as is the English of Black English speakers. Even were it to be otherwise, many teachers in these schools are already at the point that the courts recently required of teachers of speakers of Black English: they already know and speak and are functionally and emotionally comfortable with the local variety of English and can not only understand it but can use it to pedagogic effect, which means that they can use it or not use it and teach their pupils to vary their repertoires as well.

When we turn to the ethnic mother tongues, the situation is somewhat more varied insofar as speakers of non-school varieties are concerned. American-born children do not come to either the French school or the Hebrew school speaking these respective languages. Thus, these children get their first, or first major, exposure to the non-English language in school proper, and, therefore, no dialect but the school dialect is initially learned. As for native speakers of these two languages—some ten to fifteen per cent in each school—neither school is terribly pleased with them, but not for reasons of distance from the school norm. They mostly represent streaming problems in the early grades, for they are already fluent in a language that other pupils are still learning. In the French case, no arrivals from overseas have ever *dared* bring (or so we are told) a non-school variety of the language into school from their homes. Presumably, whether they come from Toulouse, Marseilles or Strasbourg, they have already been dialect disinfected, either by their prior school or by the cleansing effect of crossing the Atlantic. Native Hebrew speakers are also rarely perceived as ethnolinguistically problematic. Indeed, although a few arrive pronouncing glottals not available in the Ashkenazi phonological repertoire,

more arrive with a disdain for religious ritual and belief, and that is infinitely more problematic for the school authorities than a few glottals here or there.

The dialect problem is somewhat more recognizable at the Greek and Armenian schools. In both of these cases, the majority of children arrive either speaking the language or accustomed to hearing it in a variety not identical to that stressed by the school. Additional minor complications enter in the Greek case given the recency of the *demotiki* standard (1977) which the school has adopted and the fact that no *demotiki* texts are available for all grades, particularly the upper ones. Accordingly, *Katarevusa* texts, the semi-classicized variety that alone was considered school-worthy in Greece until a few years ago, are still at times used—particularly in the upper grades. Nevertheless, there is no adult community *Katarevusa*-loyalty to cope with and, apparently, no major intra-dialectal demotic divergence to overcome. Thus, dialect differences of whatever kind are viewed as ephemeral and minor insofar as the school's functioning is concerned. They are no problem insofar as Greek literacy acquisition and retention are concerned. The same is true in the Armenian case. It is not seen as problematic that there are two modern standards—one in Soviet Armenia and one in the diaspora—nor problematic that even diaspora parents and children are derived from a wide variety of countries of origin (Greece, Turkey, Lebanon, Syria) and, therefore, also bring a variety of different dialect backgrounds to the school. Children learn the school variety—spoken, written, and read—with no particular problems related to their home dialects. Then, like the children in the Greek school, they also learn on their own to sound out the older ecclesiastic variety for church rituals that they have already partially internalized. If the children speak different dialects to their parents at home, and they do, these differences are soon leveled at school; and no special exercises or materials or efforts are required for this purpose. Indeed, both schools tell stories of the triumph of the school dialect over the home dialect in certain homes rather than stories about the intrusion of the home dialect into the school.

The Chinese case has the potential for being ever so much more complex. Mandarin, Cantonese, Shanghaiese—all the Chinese dialects are extremely different in their reading pronunciations of the characters (which they share). *P'u-ting hua* ("common speech" based on modern Pekingese) in turn differs from them all. What would a Chinese school do if, indeed, it were to have students from all of these different spoken-dialect and reading-dialect backgrounds? Fortunately, the dynamics of most Chinese-American schools are such that the problem hardly ever arises with any great seriousness. Our school teaches City-Cantonese reading pronuncia-

tion because most of the parents derive from one or another Cantonese dialect area. Although their rural Cantonese dialects differ quite substantially from each other—certainly as much as Black English differs from "school English"—the parents' and teachers' view is that Cantonese have "always" learned to read in City-Cantonese reading pronunciation, and that is what their children will do today. In essence, therefore, all the children are learning a new and quite discrepant dialect relative to their home dialect. The rare Pekingese child who may wander into the school is said to make an early if not easy adjustment both to the spoken school dialect and to its reading dialect. Teachers may or may not know the variety or dialect that children bring to school. This is considered unessential. All beginners must learn the spoken school dialect. They do so little by little. At the same time, little by little, they also acquire the reading school dialect. It is just a matter of practice, perserverance, and patience rather than a problem insofar as all involved are concerned.

## ETHNOGRAPHIC COMPARISONS

Both reading and writing involve use of arbitrary characters, namely those of the printing system on the one hand and of the writing system on the other. Sometimes these characters are essentially like those of English, as in the French school; usually—in our sample of schools—they are not, not only in their overt shapes and basic rationales (phonemic, syllabary, ideographic) but not even in their direction. Sometimes they have one system for writing and printing as in Chinese, but more often they do not. Sometimes the printing system has both capitals and lower case, but sometimes, as in Armenian, Hebrew and Chinese, it does not. We rarely stop to think just how difficult the total graphic system may be for the beginner, even without the additional complexity of biliteracy to cope with and even without the issue of whether reading and writing should or should not be taught simultaneously in either language.

Complex though this ethno*graphic* area may be in terms of all of its possible permutations and combinations, it is really not very complex in practice. There is not a school among our five that makes much of the difference between English printing/writing and its own particular non-English printing/writing. This is never volunteered as a reason why any pupil has a problem in reading/writing. No school has prolonged the period of printing nor made much use of texts that are in writing rather than in printing in order to shield their pupils from the potential confusion inherent in yet another system of characters. Neither dyslexia nor reversals nor mixtures of writing systems are at all common initial problems, and any exceptions to this rule "quickly figure it out." All in all, writing system

and printing system conflicts just don't exist, either within languages or across them, except as extremely fleeting and unimportant affairs.

Rather than problem causing, the non-English writing/printing systems are generally regarded as identity-related, tradition-related, and sanctity-related. The French school gives handwriting lessons because French and, derivatively, also English *must* be written beautifully. The language that is beautiful to the ear must be beautiful to the eye, too! The ethnic printing systems in the other schools are clearly sanctity-related, and their sanctity is taught to the younger generation. The sanctity of the printing system contributes to the sanctity, to the non-triviality, to the heightened experience of reading per se in those languages. The characters themselves, as visuals and as graphemes, are surrounded by stories, poems, songs, and folklore.[7] They are related to the establishment of heaven and earth, to the giving of the Law, to holy martyrdom, to the triumph of the spirit, to overcoming adversity, to glorious attainments and incomparable achievements. It is doubly good to read and write in those "oh, so special characters"!

## CONCLUSIONS

It is the functional dimension that seems to carry the brunt of the biliteracy acquisition and retention "burden" in the schools we have studied. Our five schools differ greatly with respect to their ethnopedagogic, ethnolinguistic and ethnographic profiles, and yet these differences are not at all related to any differences between their pupils insofar as the attainment or mastery of biliteracy. They all stress *both* of the languages that they teach, and this stress seems to be paying off. Most pupils come from at least moderately biliterate homes. Literacy in each language has its particular functions. English literacy cannot fill the functions of ethnic language literacy. The immediate community supports and admires the school's stress on ethnic language fluency, and both the immediate community and the greater community stress the importance of English. All the other potentially problem-causing factors are neither viewed, experienced, nor observed to be problem causing. For intact and vibrant and self-regulatory ethnic communities, the outsider's search for problems with biliteracy is met with good-humored puzzlement. The children read well, do they not? Indeed they do! They read, and may yet write, in two languages because they are bilingual and bicultural, with

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[7] See Rockies.

significant literacy-related roles in both languages and cultures. They expect to continue in this fashion. Grant God that they may!

Thus the early childhood acquistion and retention of biliteracy seems to require nothing more than two "cultures of reading" to institute, implement, and reward it. When viewed in societal perspective, children seem to learn to read, in some ways, not unlike the way they learn to speak—by being immersed in a world that reads, that enjoys reading, that benefits from reading, that values reading, that supports reading, and that demands reading for full-fledged membership.

Given this kind of support, societal biliteracy is relatively unproblematic. It easily weathers such minor static as ethnopedagogic, ethnolinguistic and ethnographic variation, given a strong ethnofunctional base. These three dimensions of variation can be realized in any one of a number of different ways, and yet the acquisition and retention of biliteracy may remain unaffected and definitely unimpeded. The eternal quest for better teaching methods must not lead us away from this basic truth. The fact of non-standard speech must not hide it from us. The endless variety of graphophonic and ideographic systems must not distract us. Given societies where reading really makes a difference in what counts and what works for its members, most of their children will learn how to read rather well and rather easily, be it in one language or, if the opportunity presents itself, in two, or even in more.[8] Certainly, it does not seem to be at all necessary for non-English language using/valuing parental communities in New York City today to consider foregoing their non-English language or the goal of literacy therein in order to foster greater attainments in English literacy among their children.

Social theoreticians and politicians, and those who are both simultaneously, may be uncomfortable with ethnicity, may view it as conflictual, may regard it as a falsification of empirical facts, may consider it expendable, and may in various other ways confuse their own personal and communal experiences and aspirations (ethnically colored ones to be sure, however much *that* may be denied) with "universal processes," but ethnic communities in New York City and elsewhere as well, indeed wherever the economic, intellectual and political climate permits, give ample evidence that their ethnicity is not only integrative, creative, enriching, true, and peaceful, but that it is compatible with good schooling in English as well as in the non-English language which is so meaningful to them. Indeed, as the

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[8] Abraham Stahl, "The Cultural Antecedents of Sociolinguistic Differences," *Comparative Education*, II (1975), 147-152.

French school reveals, literacy in two languages is attainable, at least for the early grades, even without ethnicity and its network of communal support.

The temptation to derive from our work conclusions that might be widely relevant to all the trials and tribulations of literacy acquisition in America today must be resisted. Nevertheless, the comparisons provided by our work *do* prompt some additional questions and observations. If ethnic communities in New York City—surrounded as they are by the world of English—can manage to organize schools that effectively teach predominantly English-speaking children reading and writing in the particularistic languages of their respective ethnocultural traditions, why cannot most of our public schools in New York City organize themselves to effectively teach English reading and writing to non-English mother tongue children or adults? Can the successes of ethnic community schools, and even of non-ethnic non-English schools such as the French school we have been studying, be maintained beyond puberty—when the effectiveness of schooling faces new and stronger competition from out-of-school sources—without far stronger communal functional rewards than those that now seem to be operative? Is the tendency, observed in the schools we have been studying, not to recognize difficulties of various kinds really a valid indication that those difficulties are not there? Or might reading/writing have been even better acquired if such difficulties *were* recognized and tackled? No one study can answer all the questions prompted by its own findings, let alone the questions prompted by other studies and outside realities. A good study frequently fosters more good questions.

Recent studies suggest we may, indeed, now be approaching a period of renewed conviction concerning the potential effectiveness of teachers, schools, and schooling.[9] Nevertheless, as optimal pedagogy advances, the discrepancy between actual and optimal student attainments grows. Seemingly, then, the familial and societal contribution to attainment becomes ever greater, and without the favorable and constant input of families, neighborhoods, and ever broader societal factors, such as encountered in the schools we have been studying, the attainment of a literate democracy for millions upon millions of English speaking

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[9] Benjamin S. Bloom, *Better Learning in the Schools: A Primer for Parents, Teachers and Other Educators* (New York: Mcgraw-Hill, 1980) as well as R. Gary Bridge, Peter R. Moock, and Charles M. Judd, *The Determinants of Educational Outcomes: The Impact of Families, Peers, Teachers and Schools* (Cambridge: Ballinger, 1979).

monolinguals will remain problematic indeed. Thus, it is ultimately at the societal level that "a job must be done," rather than at the level of methodology per se. Without proper societal arrangements—reward, opportunities, and encouragement—our most advanced methodological refinements come a cropper. With them, they may be somewhat superfluous.